

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-15)
Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
Member Day Hearing on Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act
May 16, 2023

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the House Armed Services Committee:

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to share my priorities for Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). As a Member of Congress, I strive to meet the needs of our servicemen and women. I am the father of an active-duty soldier who received a Purple Heart during Operation Iraqi Freedom, a firm believer in the importance of a strong national defense, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to be here today and share my priorities.

I recognize the challenges placed before the Committee and appreciate your ongoing commitment to our soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen even when difficult choices must be made. Despite these tough choices, you recognize the troops are on the front lines, in danger, defending the freedoms we all hold so dear. Given the ongoing instability in Eastern Europe and throughout the world, it is imperative our country always maintains the lethality and strategic edge it has had for decades. It is our duty to maintain and ensure robust funding for the defense of our nation.

Military Housing

The most critical asset in the defense of our nation are the men and women who choose to serve. Every day, service members choose to put their lives on the line to uphold our values and Constitution. Not only do they themselves make life-changing sacrifices, but so do their families. Therefore, to have the most lethal and effective military in the world, our personnel and families deserve to have their most basic needs addressed. This starts with military housing.

For several years now, military housing has been plagued with widespread complaints of neglect and unsafe conditions, such as mold, lead-based paint, asbestos, poor water quality and sewage, and careless repairs. The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to ensure tenants receive quality housing and fair treatment, such as implementing the Tenant Bill of Rights. In fact, this very committee has taken steps to address this issue by passing an amendment in the FY2020 NDAA that directed the Secretary of Defense to develop a centralized assessment tool for members of the Armed Forces and their family members to identify, rate, and compare housing.

I have recently introduced legislation, the Military Housing Transparency and Accountability Act, which expands the assessment tool to include all military housing, including privatized housing, barracks, and housing for service members unaccompanied by dependents. My bill would also enhance the reporting section by requiring the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

for Housing to submit an annual report to both House and Senate Armed Services Committee's and the respective secretaries within the DOD.

Therefore, it is my hope the Committee will consider inclusion of my bipartisan bill, the Military Housing Transparency and Accountability Act, in the FY24 NDAA. Given the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges in our Armed Forces, ensuring adequate housing for service members and their families is an important, necessary part of the solution.

Pow/MIA Resolution

As the United States continues to develop trade ties in regions of the world where service members were once engaged in combat, we should make every effort to ensure prospective trading partner countries are active participants in the recovery of our service members. Currently, more than 81,000 service members from World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam remain unaccounted for. While several nations have worked to assist the United States in research and recovery efforts, many challenges still exist when it comes to negotiating access and conducting recovery operations on foreign soil.

Over the past couple of years, I have been proud to introduce a bipartisan resolution which encourages our trading partners to continue search and recovery activities for POW/MIA members. The families and friends of these American heroes deserve no less than our greatest efforts to bring their loved one's home. Therefore, I respectfully request the Committee authorize robust funding for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency in FY24.

Commented [AB1]: Is this language identical to last year?

Commented [HC2R1]: Yes

AbilityOne Authorization Increase

Our service members dedicate their lives and well-being to protect our nations values. That is why we must remain committed to providing them with the resources they need both during and after their time of service. One way the DOD fulfills this commitment is by being the largest federal partner of the AbilityOne program.

The AbilityOne program helps thousands of Americans who are blind or have significant disabilities provide an array of products and services for our military personnel, employing more than 36,000 people – including over 2,500 veterans – with a visual impairment. In an April 2022 Equity Plan, the DOD pledged to increase its utilization of AbilityOne to 1% by 2027. The AbilityOne program has witnessed a consistent decline in employment from a peak of 50,000 employees in 2014 to around 36,000 today. That is why I urge this committee to support a 1% increase in DOD procurement in order to provide more visually impaired Americans with opportunities to be self-sufficient, while at the same time improving the lives our men and women in uniform.

Healthcare Research

As a former health care professional, I respectfully request we continue to support and fund vital Department of Defense research programs. These include research programs for Multiple Sclerosis, ALS, Breast and Ovarian Cancer, Traumatic Brain Injuries, PTSD, suicide, and the

Peer Reviewed Orthopedic Research Program. I strongly believe making critical investments in medical research at the federal level will improve the well-being of our active-duty military personnel, veterans, and ultimately all Americans.

Supporting Buy American Policies

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine have taught us the importance of having a strong, efficient, and effective domestic supply chain. Thus, it is critical we continue to strengthen our Buy American policies. We cannot allow our military to lack equipment, parts for maintenance, or suffer delays in production. As our adversaries continue to grow and expand their military capabilities, we must remain committed to advancing our military with trusted manufacturers and suppliers located here in the United States.

I want to thank you Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and the members of this Committee for your continued dedication to the matters within the jurisdiction of the House Armed Services Committee. I appreciate your consideration of these priorities and look forward to working together in the future.